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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 011926

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [ELN](#) [ELN](#)

SUBJECT: GOC-ELN TALKS: CIVIL SOCIETY GUARANTOR PROVIDES
READOUT

REF: A. BOGOTA 11862

[B](#). BOGOTA 11611

[C](#). BOGOTA 11461

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

[1](#). (C) One of the five civil society guarantors for the GOC-ELN talks, Moritz Akerman, said December 26 the ELN wanted to end its insurgency and run candidates for mayoral offices in 2007. The ELN would like to participate in the 2006 Congressional and presidential polls but only by "consulting" with candidates on policy issues. It is prepared to enter into a cease-fire by March and would be prepared to disarm prior to running candidates in 2007. In Akerman's view, the ELN has not given much thought to the terms of its "punishment" for its criminal activity. The ELN seemed more organized than the GOC in Havana and was prepared to move to substantive discussions, but the GOC was more cautious. Akerman said the GOC prefers to deal directly with the ELN and avoid the role of mediators. The guarantors are divided, with two of them serving as "the ELN's Foreign Ministry," Akerman said. According to Akerman, the ELN expects the FARC to attack its leadership, in part to extract revenge for a recent ELN killing of a regional FARC leader, and in part to warn the ELN not to proceed too far down the negotiating path with the GOC. The talks resume on or about January 21 in Havana. End summary.

What Does the ELN Want?

[2](#). (C) Akerman told D/Polcouns December 26 the ELN wants to get involved in political activity as soon as possible, and would like to run candidates for election in 2007 mayoral races. Akerman understands that ELN military commander Antonio Garcia wants to be able to "consult" openly on policy issues with leftist candidates for Congress and the presidency in 2006. According to Akerman, the ELN is prepared to agree to a cease-fire, perhaps as early as March. Akerman said the ELN is concerned about not being "humiliated" and would be more likely to accept a cease-fire if it could be presented as a demand of civil society rather than as a GOC negotiating term. The ELN is prepared to disarm before it runs candidates for election in 2007, he said. In Akerman's view, the ELN has not considered the price it is willing to pay for being allowed to get involved in democratic politics. He said the ELN would be unlikely to accept "Justice and Peace law" terms and would press for amnesty and pardon. Akerman reported that former President Cesar Gaviria is talking directly with ELN spokesperson and negotiator Francisco Galan.

Antonio Garcia and Luis Carlos Restrepo

[3](#). (C) Akerman said Garcia was "flexible" and "measured" in Havana, a significant contrast to previous occasions Akerman has seen him, where Garcia was "arrogant" and "stubborn." Akerman said Garcia seemed very concerned with preserving the dialogue with the GOC. At one point, Garcia grew frustrated with Restrepo's apparently narrow negotiating room and said he would leave Cuba and let Restrepo negotiate with Galan, referring any agreements to Garcia and Uribe for approval, but later backed down. Garcia said, however, that he hoped Restrepo would be in a stronger negotiating position when talks resumed.

[4](#). (C) Akerman said the guarantors and "accompanying countries" (Spain, Norway and Switzerland) worked hard to build a positive relationship between Garcia and Restrepo in the days preceding the December 16 formal inauguration of the talks (ref C). Garcia and Restrepo met alone several times for 30 minute coffees in the morning, and later met, together with their associates, in a protocol house the Cubans provided to the Government of Colombia.

Guarantors, Group of Three Countries Marginalized

15. (C) Akerman reported that the guarantors and representatives from Spain, Norway and Switzerland were "marginalized" during the talks, primarily because the GOC wanted to deal directly with the ELN. According to Akerman, GOC Ambassador to Cuba, Fernando Londono, disagrees with the apparent decision to keep the guarantors away from the formal talks but said, referring to Restrepo, "he's in charge, not me." Akerman did not complain about the "marginalization" but said if the talks continue there would likely be a need for some kind of mediation assistance, whether from the guarantors, the group of three countries, or some other source. Akerman said Spain was more inclined to follow the GOC lead, whereas Norway and Switzerland would prefer to play a more active role.

Talks Cordial, ELN Seemed More Organized

16. (C) Akerman said the guarantors and representatives from Spain, Norway and Switzerland were not present during the formal talks but met regularly with the participants before and after the sessions; based on those side meetings, Akerman characterized the formal talks as cordial. He said "people just talked and talked," which he said was a positive development. At the conclusion of the talks December 21, the ELN presented the GOC with a draft communique that said the exploratory phase had been successful and the talks would now move to the "pre-negotiation" phase late January. According to Akerman, the GOC rejected the text and said it wanted to continue with "exploratory" talks when discussions resumed. (Akerman said he expects to get the ELN text from Galan and will provide it to the Embassy.) In Akerman's view, the ELN seemed more organized than the GOC, in that it was prepared to move forward with concrete proposals. By contrast, the GOC was somewhat surprised by the ELN's approach and needed more time to analyze its next move. Akerman said the GOC might be concerned that moving to substantive ELN peace talks in the middle of 2006 Congressional and presidential electoral campaigns would be too risky. He said if the talks failed, the GOC could be accused of failing to seize an opportunity, whereas if they succeeded the GOC could be faced with more loud and articulate leftist voices in the middle of the campaigns.

Talks Resume in Havana Late January

17. (C) Akerman said the talks are expected to resume in Havana around January 21. The GOC and ELN seemed satisfied with the Havana venue, the former because Castro stays out of developments and allows the GOC to control matters, the latter because its members are not subject to being arrested, as they could be if the talks took place in Europe. In Akerman's view, the talks should be moved from Cuba because of the "stifling" political atmosphere on the island. The ELN would benefit from being exposed to a "normal" democratic environment.

Cubans Unpleasant, Akerman Says, but Garcia Marquez Helpful

18. (C) Akerman characterized the Cuban Communist Party officials who met the guarantors at the Havana airport as unpleasant and brusque. He said they told the guarantors upon their arrival, "Welcome to Cuba. If any of you or any representative from an 'accompanying country' meets with even one dissident while you are here, this entire process will be called off and you will all be sent home." He said such officials continued with similar "rude" comments from time to time.

19. (C) By contrast, Akerman said Colombian novelist and Fidel Castro friend Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who maintains a residence in Havana, was helpful during the talks. Garcia Marquez apparently has developed a close relationship with ELN military commander Garcia, to the extent of organizing and paying for Garcia's operation in Cuba on three herniated discs about seven years ago and serving as a sounding board for Garcia's poetry efforts. (Akerman said Garcia Marquez insisted several times that Akerman join him in Cuba, for at least part of the year. Garcia Marquez told Akerman that he was "alone" in Havana and that Castro "was always too busy to see me.")

Guarantors Divided

10. (C) In the face of Cuban hostility, Akerman said the guarantors were divided. He characterized two of the five guarantors (Alejo Vargas and Daniel Garcia-Pena) as

"basically the ELN's Foreign Ministry." In Akerman's view, such divisions can be managed at the moment but could become more significant as the process unfolds.

FARC Attack on ELN Expected

11. (C) Akerman said the ELN is expecting a FARC attack in the Catatumbo region, the site of the ELN's leadership. He said the attack would be related in part to the recent ELN killing of Arauca FARC leader "El Che" (ref A) and in part to send a signal to the ELN that its talks with the GOC should not progress much further.

Comment

12. (C) We will continue to support the ELN process. It is understandable that, after the ELN walked away from the last three peace attempts, the GOC is wary, especially of being entrapped at election time. Restrepo has told us he is dubious about ELN intentions, but willing to move forward. That the ELN is in a hurry, refuses to accept the Justice and Peace Law, and wants to "consult" with candidates in next year's elections creates a very difficult dynamic, at a time when a lot of other things are going on. We can expect civil society guarantors and the three European facilitators to push for rapid GOC movement, whether merited by ELN positions or not. In addition, any concessions given to the ELN will have to be given to the paramilitaries. Stay tuned.
WOOD